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ALASKA PASSENGER VESSEL SAFETY ALERT 01-00

CRUISE SHIP SUFFERS FIRE IN CREW BERTHING

Background: The Seventeenth Coast Guard District's Safety Alert program provides timely safety-related information to the marine industry on "Lessons Learned" from marine casualties.

Incident: The 704' cruise ship NIEUW AMSTERDAM while underway with 1169 passengers and 542 in Glacier Bay, suffered a fire in the crew accommodation space. The first notification of the fire was an alarm on the bridge after which fire boundaries were set and fire team personnel were dispatched to the scene. Distress calls were made using VHF-FM, Single Side Band but were not responded to as the vessel was located in a area where no Coast Guard VHF coverage exists. Activation of the Global Marine Distress Signaling System (GMDSS) was immediately answered by two other cruise ships in the vicinity and relayed to the Coast Guard. The ship's fire team quickly extinguished the fire while passengers were moved to the lifeboat stations as a precautionary measure after which interior spaces were ventilated and fire watches established. The vessel did not lose power and proceeded to an area where a Coast Guard assessment team boarded. Fire damage was confined to a crew cabin with other spaces sustaining smoke damage. There was one injury to a passenger that occurred when the passenger returned to a cabin to retrieve personal belongings prior the "all clear" signal being given and was caught in a smoke filled passageway. The vessel was cleared to proceed on its intended voyage after the Coast Guard completed an extensive survey of the damaged area that ensured the safety of passengers and crew and the vessel. Coast Guard Board investigators indicate the source of the fire is highly suspected to be the use of an electrical appliance in a crew cabin.

Lessons Learned: While the casualty investigation is ongoing, there are several initial "Lessons Learned":

1. Owners and operators of passenger vessels should ensure improperly circuit-protected electrical appliances such as cooking appliances (hotplates, hotpots, etc). are not used in crew cabins.
2. Owners and operators should ensure there are no wiring modifications, such as multi-plugs, wire/cable splitters, etc. in crews' cabins that could potentially overload the rated wiring capacities of the outlets and circuit breakers.
3. The extent of the damage was mitigated by early detection, adherence to established emergency procedures and quick response by the ship's fire teams highlighting the importance of properly operating detection systems and crews trained in firefighting.
4. In emergency situations, ship crews should be vigilant in not permitting passengers to return to their cabins until it is safe to do so, and authorized.
5. The fire was contained within a section of the crew accommodation area. Properly operating fire screen doors and ventilation closures were effective in mitigating the spread of fire and smoke. These systems should be checked regularly for proper operation.
6. The GMDSS was effective in notifying other vessels in the vicinity of the distress, particularly in the remote area where other communications attempts (i.e. VHF-FM Single Side Band) were not.